The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 1 NOVEMBER 1, 1939

DEAR MEMBER,—I know that a question which is very much in the minds of many of you is what this war is going to lead to. I was shown the other day a letter written by a man in the Air Force to a friend. He recognised that the life of an air pilot was not very likely to be a long one, and said that this did not greatly trouble him if only he could be assured that his children would be able to live in a different world. But, he went on to ask, would they? Few of us have not felt the poignancy of that question.

THE CHRISTIAN CONCERN WITH THE PEACE

The course of history for centuries may be determined by the wisdom or unwisdom of the peace settlement. It is not too early to ask ourselves what is the specifically Christian concern with the terms of peace. I have had an opportunity during the past week or two of talking with several people whose knowledge and judgment I trust. The following reflections arise out of these conversations. I shall be glad to know what you think about them.

There is no specifically Christian judgment regarding the *details* of a peace settlement. The right determination of these depends on an exact knowledge of facts which in their complexity are beyond the grasp of the ordinary citizen and on a shrewd estimate of the forces at work and of the probable consequences of any particular solution. What is needed for a right decision is an informed, rational judgment and a flair for political realities. These are matters of natural endowment or special training possessed in varying measure by Christians and non-Christians alike.

There are, however, certain fundamental Christian attitudes towards the settlement which are of crucial importance. I will mention four of these. The first two are often overlooked but are, I believe, inherent in the Christian view.

GOD AS CREATOR

The first is the conviction that there is an objective rightness in things, and that human arrangements are good or bad according as they conform to it. We may have heaps of good-will and the noblest aspirations, but, if we ignore the fundamental laws of the world as God has made it, our plans will go wrong in spite of our best intentions. I cannot say more about this now. I only want to set up a sign-post pointing in a direction in which our thoughts will have to move as the discussion proceeds.

CHRISTIAN REALISM

Secondly, the authentic Christian outlook is characterised by an extreme realism. It is this that distinguishes it from an optimistic humanitarian idealism, with which it

is often confused. The Christian mind knows the radical nature of evil. This knowledge should save it from the illusions to which a rosy view of human nature is prone. At the opening of this century most people confidently believed that the ape and tiger in man were dead (though Bishop Creighton had his doubts about the rapid sublimation of the primeval donkey). To-day no one can question the terrible reality of men's evil purposes.

Nothing is gained by shutting our eyes to the fact that the end of the war will not mean the disappearance from the world of sinister forces of evil. The temper and ambitions of the gangster will not vanish in a night. There will be many occupying positions of power who are totally hostile to the Christian understanding of life or who cynically regard it as quite unrelated to the realities of the political scene. The spiritual evils which have eaten deep into the life of Western society will not be eradicated by a peace treaty. The prevailing blindness to the true values of life and the spread of moral disintegration may for a time put some desirable solutions out of reach. The restoration of health to society may take a long time. The Christian has to work tirelessly for certain ends which he believes to be the will of God without giving way to utopian expectations springing from an unrealistic view of human nature.

A CREATIVE ATTITUDE

Thirdly, we are committed as Christians to the realisation of God's purpose to redeem men and restore them to their true life. It is our task not only to defeat evil but to create good. Fear, anger and hate are the death of the creative spirit. The way of escape from the prison house in which they confine us is to allow our hearts and minds to be lifted up continually into communion with God, who is Light and Love, Creator, Father, and Redeemer. Through this worship our minds will become possessed by the thought of a family of nations, co-operating in the tasks of peace and of social, cultural, and spiritual advancement. For this the co-operation of the German people is essential. Let us face realities. Whether civilisation sinks in a succession of suicidal wars or experiences a rebirth depends on whether there is a sufficiently large body of people who are not content with victory, but are passionately determined to work for a reconciled Europe contributing the riches of its heritage and its future service to a wider community of the peoples of the world.

PEACE BY AGREEMENT

Fourthly, it follows from this that we must aim at a peace which, if we win the war, is not dictated by the superior military strength of ourselves and our allies, but is reached by negotiation and agreement. We must not yield to what the Archbishop of York, in his broadcast talk on October 2, described as " the indefensible arrogance of ourselves attempting to decide what is just, and imposing it on others."

You will doubtless perceive that between this and what was said earlier about Christian realism there is a contradiction. What if among those who negotiate there are some who are impervious to reason and believe in force as the only arbiter? What are we to do then? I should like to know your answer to this conundrum.

THE YOUTH OF THE NATION

I hope you did not fail to notice the debate in the House of Lords on October 3 on a motion by the Bishop of Winchester on what is perhaps the most vital issue with which the nation has to deal in its internal life. Before the war came a few people were beginning to awaken to the disastrous wastage of human material resulting from

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HE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER

Issued under the auspices of
the Council on the Christian Faith and the Common Life.

EDITOR: J. H. OLDHAM

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THE purpose of the News-Letter is to meet a widespread need for help in facing the baffling problems which face e Christian in the world to-day. The present emergency lls for a concerted effort on the part of Christians to nderstand the religious meaning of the experiences through hich we are passing so that we may find the way to right tion.

The News-Letter seeks to provide a means whereby the esults of this common thinking may reach and stimulate as ide a constituency as possible.

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the neglect by the community of the physical, mental, and moral education of its future citizens between the ages of fourteen and eighteen.

The figures are startling if one stops to think what they mean. Out of nearly three million young people between these ages some 450,000, or 15 per cent., enjoy the privilege of full-time schooling. If account is taken of those who receive some form of part-time education or belong to some voluntary organisation, it is estimated that between one-third and one-half of the total are given some further training. For the majority no provision is made at all. The problem is in every respect as urgent in war as in time of peace, and in some directions the needs are greater and more pressing.

The President of the Board of Education, in a remarkably sympathetic reply to the debate, recognised that the winning of the war would be a very partial victory if the generation on which the future depends were to prove unequal to the tasks which follow.

He undertook to circularise local authorities, and announced the appointment of a strong committee to advise the Government on the subject. He also made an earnest appeal to patriotic men and women over military age and to those leaving school who have a year or two before joining up to devote themselves to the service of youth and supply the leadership which is indispensable for carrying on the work.

I hope soon to devote one of our supplements to this question. Can some of you set to work in the meantime to find out the state of things in your locality and to get a move on? The first step is to ascertain exactly what is being done by the local education authority and by voluntary organisations to meet the need.

THE SUPPLEMENT

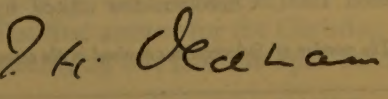
The subject of the supplement this week is of supreme importance. The article is an honest dealing with great issues, and is consequently provocative. But, as I wrote in our preliminary number, we can learn much from those with whom we disagree. If you will let me know your disagreements or questions, it will help me in planning for further discussion. The paper is perhaps rather stiff reading. But I believe that what is needed for its understanding is not so much acuteness of intellect or philosophical training as a mind exercised by the religious problem.

AN ENCLOSURE

Since those of you who have become members at the start have done so on the strength of a promise rather than an achievement, I can safely assume that you are keen about the undertaking and eager to help in making it a success. I therefore enclose a second copy of this first regular issue, which you can doubtless use to secure another subscriber.

I offer my congratulations on his election to Parliament to Commander Stephen King-Hall, to whose brilliant example the inception of this News-Letter is due.

Yours sincerely,



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NOTES

The Peace Aims of the Government. The Prime Minister, speaking in the House of Commons on October 12, defined the policy of the Government in the following terms:

"It is no part of our policy to exclude from her rightful place in Europe a Germany which will live in amity and confidence with other nations. On the contrary, we believe that no effective remedy can be found for the world's ills that does not take account of the just claims and needs of all countries, and, whenever the time may come to draw the lines of a new peace settlement, his Majesty's Government would feel that the future would hold little hope unless such a settlement could be reached through the method of negotiation and agreement . . .

We seek no material advantage for ourselves; we desire nothing from the German people which should offend their self-respect. We are not aiming only at victory, but rather looking beyond it to the laying of a foundation of a better international system which will mean that war is not to be the inevitable lot of every succeeding generation."

The Needs of Youth. At a time when their work is more urgently needed than ever, the activities of many clubs for both boys and girls have been seriously hampered or brought to an end by the commandeering of their buildings or by the loss of leaders who have been called up for national service. The closing of a club means in many instances that the boys or girls are left with nothing to do in the evenings except to hang about the streets in the dark. Happily, however, many clubs are still carrying on their work. Some have made themselves responsible without assistance for the measures required by the black-out. Some are devoting special attention to the needs of evacuated children and others are attempting to make the club a centre of entertainment for the neighbourhood. There are towns and villages in which the clergy or keen social workers are placing their houses at the disposal of the clubs as centres for recreation.

The Unity of the Universal Church. In the world of nations unity is a goal to be achieved, in the Christian Church it is an already given fact. In partaking of the body of their common Lord, Christians are united by the closest of bonds. The following extracts are from a letter written by a German to a friend in England. The writer was residing abroad and wrote the letter on the eve of being called up for military service.

"With these lines I have to say farewell to you. We have to expect to be called for military service in Germany. What this way means for men like ourselves, who were blessed in these years by friendship and trust, by fellowship and love of Christians all over the world, that cannot be expressed in human words . . .

And now we have to go the way into darkness. We are not alone on this way. Jesus Christ is being with us. And if the day comes when the light of God and His mercy will shine again upon our peoples and churches, then do remember, my dear friend, if I am still alive, that there is a friend of yours in whose heart all the spiritual heritage of thirteen years does not fade away, and who will be ready for all the work for God after this time of great temptation."

From a Chinese Magazine. "In the life and death struggle in which our country is at present engaged there can be no room for such petty feelings as hatred and vengeance against the Japanese people and nation. Our cause is just and we must fight clearly with our souls untarnished. It is easy to be humane when everything goes happily. The supreme test of our humanity comes when times are out of joint. To be kind and gentle amidst a sea of carnage and cruelty; to keep being reasonable when everybody else is mad; to tend human lives in whatever skin they may happen to be, that is what we must desperately try to do. We are confident that China will always be China as long as we can be like that."

From the Postbag. A woman who has played a large part in public life writes:—

"What the world needs now is the good neighbour, the dependable friend; and there is no person who can help the country to combat the dangers of hysteria and panic fears more than the woman in the home and from her home. The woman who, in a crisis, can go on running her home in quietness and confidence, who can use her precious leisure as the contemplatives of old used theirs to create around her a sense of spiritual values, a kind of sanctuary so that even to be with her gives a sense of rest and banishes fear."

The number of Subscriptions received in the seven days following the publication of the preliminary number is 2,045. *We are encouraged.*

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THE CHRISTIAN
NEWS-LETTER
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The Supplement
No. 1

WHAT IS GOD DOING?

IF we are to understand this calamitous war and to act in it as Christians, we must begin by asking: What is God doing in this situation? The Christian life is a response. It is man's answer to God's initiative. Only as we see what He is doing, can we respond to that initiative.

We cannot trace God's hand in this tragedy by standing on the defensive and trying to find evidence of the Providence of God in a situation where all the main forces appear to disprove it. Nothing less than the audacity which can assert that in some sense "this is the Lord's doing" will carry us through the agony of a world at war. So we are not asking: How can it be shewn for our consolation and hope that God's hand is one real factor among a great number of ungodly ones? The question before the whole body of Christians is just whether there is "faith on the earth," and that means faith that God is working His purpose out not merely in spite of, but actually through the tragedy itself. It is a stupendous act of faith, but nothing less bold will do as the witness of Christian faith at this time.

We can reach a Christian understanding of what is happening only if we start from the act of faith that the war, which has come to pass through the sinfulness of man, is a new opportunity for God, which He can and will use for furthering His purpose on earth—an opportunity through which even greater things may be achieved than would have been possible through the continuance of a peace that was no peace.

Our conviction is that war is the utmost contradiction of God's purpose for men. It is humanity's greatest collective sin. The evils which men endure and inflict and absorb in war are in themselves utterly contrary to the purpose of God. Yet, in spite of this, our belief in divine Providence and in God as the Lord of history stakes all upon the further conviction that, the forces of evil being there, God uses them as well as the forces of good in the working out of His purpose. The evil forces at work in human society are, through the outbreak of war, being laid bare as they would not have been if we had gone on in the existing state of peacefulness which we ought to have known to be no real peace.

This does not mean that our generation will inevitably find its real good through the stark horrors of war. But it does mean that there is now open for us a way to find that good, which would have been closed if "the powers of this world" had continued to operate and their outbreak in war had just been suppressed. It is in this sense that we have to understand the judgment of God.

THE UNMASKING OF FORCES

What, then, is God doing in this emergency? The first answer for the Christian is that He is bringing out into the open forces

in the world which would eat up the marrow of our life if we were not forced to see their effects in outward conflict. We are thereby given a new opportunity of mastering them. We may not act on that disclosure, but without the disclosure we should not know what is demanded of us. Whatever men may do at least God is answering the prayer:

From sleep and from damnation
Deliver us good Lord.

If at the outset we have faith to see as much as this, then more will be disclosed to us of what God is doing. We cannot in advance discern the meaning of all events. But already, for those who have eyes to see, God is making plain something of the nature of the corporate evil to which we were in danger of remaining blind and acquiescent, and something of the nature of true human living to which the cruel shock of war is calling us back.

War reveals nakedly the malignity of the forces which disrupt human society in countless ways other than war. It lights up the difference between the tares and the wheat which God allows to grow together until the harvest of the Last Judgment when the final verdict is pronounced. It gives us a foretaste of that harvest. It makes us see more clearly what is evil and what is good in the relations between nations, and within each nation, as well as in our own personal lives. By forcing the evil to bear its deadly fruit, war makes it possible for us to see by contrast what the good corn is like, and so gives us a new opportunity to identify our social and personal lives with it.

DESTRUCTION OF FALSE PEACE

Secondly, God is declaring that a state of thinly veiled conflict, the outbreak of which into actual war is only just suppressed, is not true peace. Mere absence of war is not His will for us nor our greatest good. Nations with deep internal disharmonies try to escape from the consequences by changes in their external relations. They attempt to unload their own problems on other peoples or to ease the effects of their contradictory aims by spreading them over a wider area. This is called expansion, and when others resist there is war.

A true peace will be more than a truce between nations, muzzled by fear, who are itching to make others a means of solving their own problems. It will arise naturally out of a concourse of nations, each with a native health of its own, which will allow it to say " What can I do for you? " instead of " How can you be a convenience for me? " We are learning that the justice which underlies true peace is more than an attempt to be fair in an atmosphere of suspended rivalry. It requires a rightness in each nation's own life that will enable it to substitute collaborating strength for calculating weakness.

There is, therefore, danger in prayer and desire just for the cessation of strife, without prayer and desire for the destruction of the deeper evils of which war is the consequence. The passion for justice which is fanned into flame in a war against ruthless aggression must not be damped down when the conflict ceases, but transferred to the constructive task of achieving a just order within nations and between nations.

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON IDOLATRIES

Thirdly, God is showing us in the policies we are resisting where men get to when they reject the Christian belief in God as Creator and Judge. National life ceases then to be an attempt to embody in the life of a particular people the universal truths and values which are the expression of God's will for mankind. It becomes a naked and unrestricted striving for power. Religion, family, science, art, and all the characteristic activities of persons cease to be activities which, being more important than itself, the state must foster and co-ordinate, and become merely things to be exploited as helps, or suppressed as hindrances, to the consolidation of social power. Violence and terror come then to be regarded as the indispensable means of the maintenance and con-

tinuance of a society which puts its own political exaltation in place of the divine law which is above all societies.

But God is showing also that this idolatry of political power which we see in the enemy is a reaction from a more disguised but not less real idolatry of commercial and financial values that has deeply infected the democratic peoples. These are able to conceal their " war-guilt " from themselves, because they have retained a conscious devotion to the moral and spiritual values of Christendom. They have, however, failed to embody them in the workaday structure of the social order. These values are being threatened to-day not only by totalitarian barbarism, but also by capitulation of the societies which profess to acknowledge them to the dominance of secular and economic interests. We claim to be at war to prevent the final overthrow of the order of life of a Christian Europe. Its overthrow will not be prevented by the defeat of the most obvious enemy. There is the even more exacting task ahead of reconstructing its whole pattern in our own community and beyond.

Shall we rise to the challenge?

THE DISCLOSURE OF FALSE VALUES

Fourthly, God is breaking up through the war a number of artificial forms of organisation and social tendencies which, if left undisturbed, would either destroy man or hinder the achievement of his full growth. A social worker is reported to have said before the war came that if, as she understood, the effect of a war would be to destroy half of London, including its slums, and scatter its population over the country, it might not be a wholly bad thing. The problems of evacuation reveal something of the nightmare of metropolitan life, and the effort to re-create community in an uprooted population is compelling an examination of the conditions of a real community. Organisation for war is giving many people a livelihood and status in the community of which they were deprived when the nation was not using up its wealth so rapidly. God is thereby putting to us a searching question. Money can be found in any quantities to discharge shells *gratis* to the enemy ; shall we again be fobbed off with the plea of poverty when the more modest demands of social decency again become clamant? Most important of all, it has taken a war to encourage the utmost use of the food-giving earth and to challenge assumptions which made agriculture subservient to industry, industry to commerce, and commerce to finance. In these and many other ways we see the warning finger of God raised against our disregard of His laws in our own country.

CHARITY, PENITENCE AND FORGIVENESS

Finally, God is pressing us to discover in this crisis a deeper understanding of the real nature of charity, penitence, and forgiveness. The words are familiar enough, but they make upon us demands far greater than we commonly realise.

Charity means more than wishing another people well and a readiness to live at peace with them. It requires not only a new kind of attitude to others at moments when relations become strained, but a changed attitude to the pattern of life which ought to be normal in peace time. The conference-table efforts failed because the seeds of irreconcilable rivalry are hidden in the nature of what is assumed to be regular international intercourse. Charity means strength to spare over and above the strength required to exist. That strength to spare is set free when a solution has been found of internal conflicts.

Penitence involves more than a general acknowledgment that all nations are sinful. It involves a discrimination between the good and evil elements in our own community and penitence for blindness to the evil. It also means acknowledgment of the good, as well as resistance to the evil, in the

enemy. It means, moreover, that if our two goods are to be combined against our common evil, we must begin with our own disinfection from the common poison before expecting it in the other.

Forgiveness we can now see must be more than forgetting past wrongs; it involves a definite restoration of a co-operative relationship. It means a readiness to say to the party which has immediate responsibility for injury: "Though you have done wrong you are not therefore wholly evil; nor are we wholly good because we have withstood your evil. You are now, upon acknowledgment of your evil, as fit as we are, with the acknowledgment of ours, to co-operate in making our common life anew."

To sum up, God is offering to those who have faith, the insight and power which will enable them to fight the foreign, the domestic, and the interior enemy all at once.

NOTE.—This paper, like other unsigned articles which will appear in the Supplement, is the outcome of discussion by a group. It must not be taken as representing the collective mind of our collaborators: some, I know, disagree with some things in it. Nor will what appears in the Supplement always represent my own views. What I aim at is to give to readers each week a considered statement on an important subject, to the shaping of which different minds and different types of experience have made their contribution, as a stimulus to thought and a starting-point for further discussion.—J. H. O.

All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—

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